

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 SAJ-01 DRC-01 /116 W

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P R 301614Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0796

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PFOR, UK, EI

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: BACK TO DIRECT RULE

SUMMARY. FOLLOWING MEETING OF PM WILSON WITH SENIOR CABINET MINISTERS MAY 29, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT BRITAIN WOULD RESUME DIRECT RULE IN NORTHERN IRELAND FOR AT LEAST FOUR MONTHS, AND THAT PARLIAMENT WOULD BE RECALLED FROM ITS WHITSUN RECESS FOR A TWO-DAY EMERGENCY DEBATE (JUN 3 AND 4). IT IS EXPECTED THAT OPPOSITION LEADER HEATH, NOW VISITING CHINA, WILL FLY HOME IN TIME TO

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PARTICIPATE. OBJECT OF GOVERNMENT IN IMMEDIATE PERIOD

AHEAD WILL BE TO PROVIDE COOLING OFF PERIOD DURING WHICH EFFORTS CAN BE MADE TO SALVAGE WHAT CAN BE SALVAGED OF POLITICAL STRUCTURE, ESPECIALLY POWER-SHARING CONCEPT, BUILT UP IN NI OVER PAST TWO YEARS. END SUMMARY.

1. BECAUSE LEGISLATION UNDER WHICH PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT FIRST IMPOSED DIRECT RULE HAS LAPSED (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS ACT OF 1972), YESTERDAY'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF A RETURN TO A FORM OF DIRECT RULE IN NI IS BASED ON PROVISIONS OF 1973 NI CONSTITUTION ACT WHICH BROUGHT NI ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE INTO BEING. THIS ACT EMPOWERS NI SECRETARY OF STATE TO MAKE AN ORDER IN COUNCIL PROROGUING NI ASSEMBLY FOR MAXIMUM PERIOD OF FOUR MONTHS, AFTER WHICH PARLIAMENT WOULD HAVE TO APPROVE ANY FURTHER EXTENSION OF PROROGATION. (NOTE: UNDER NI CONSTITUTION ACT, HMG COULD TECHNICALLY HAVE ATTEMPTED TO KEEP EXECUTIVE IN BEING BY APPOINTING TO IT NEW MEMBERS, FROM WITHIN OR OUTSIDE OF ASSEMBLY, TO REPLACE FAULKNER AND HIS SUPPORTERS. DECISION NOT TO DO SO WAS BASED ON REALISTIC ASSESSMENT THAT ANY SUCH EFFORT WOULD FAIL AT THIS TIME.)

2. PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DIRECT RULE DECISION ARE THAT ALL NI LEGISLATION WILL HAVE TO PASS THROUGH BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AT WESTMINSTER AND THAT ALL LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE POWERS HITHERTO EXERCISED BY FAULKNER EXECUTIVE NOW PASS TO TWO JUNIOR MINISTERS IN NI OFFICE (STAN ORME AND LORD DONALDSON). IT IS EXPECTED THAT NI SECRETARY OF STATE REES WILL ASK PM WILSON TO SPREAD THIS BURDEN THROUGH APPOINTMENT OF ADDITIONAL MINISTERS.

3. GOVERNMENT HAS MADE CLEAR THAT ITS OBJECTIVE DURING FOUR MONTHS PROROGATION OF ASSEMBLY WILL BE TO WORK TO PRESERVE PRINCIPLE OF POWER-SHARING BETWEEN RIVAL PARTIES, RELIGIOUS AND TRIBAL FACTIONS IN NI. MERLYN REES HAS INVITED LEADERS OF ALL PARTIES, INCLUDING LOYALISTS PAISLEY, CLARK AND WEST, TO MEET WITH HIM TODAY. REES HAS CONTINUED TO REFUSE TO DEAL DIRECTLY

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WITH LEADERS OF ULSTER WORKERS COUNCIL. IT HAS ALSO BEEN REPORTED THAT REES WILL BE MEETING WITH REPUBLIC OF IRELAND'S FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD, THOUGH OUR FCO CONTACTS SAY THERE ARE NO FIRM PLANS FOR SUCH A MEETING NOW.

4. IF IT PROVES IMPOSSIBLE IN MONTHS AHEAD TO DEVELOP A CONSENSUS AMONG NI PARTIES ON SOME FORMULA TO PRESERVE POWER-SHARING CONCEPT, PRESS REPORTS THAT SENIOR MINIS-
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TERS UNDERSTAND THAT AN ENTIRELY NEW APPROACH TO NI

QUESTION MAY HAVE TO BE TRIED. FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS ARE NOT NOW SPECULATING ABOUT JUST WHAT SUCH A NEW APPROACH WOULD INVOLVE, ALTHOUGH GROWING BACKBENCH PRESSURES ON BOTH MAJOR PARTIES FOR A WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH TROOPS AND A REDUCTION OF BRITISH ECONOMIC HELP TO NI ARE BOUND TO AFFECT OUTCOME.

5. PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT SHADOW CABINET, UNDER CHAIRMANSHIP OF SIR ALEC DOUGLAS-HOME IN HEATH'S ABSENCE, WILL BE MEETING TODAY OR TOMORROW TO CONSIDER RECENT NI DEVELOPMENTS. SO FAR, CONSERVATIVE NI AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN FRANCIS PYM HAS STOUTLY SUPPORTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS. IT SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT SOLID BIPARTISAN APPROACH TO NI WILL BREAK. HOWEVER, SOME DISSATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF CRISIS IS EVIDENT, IN PARTICULAR WITH WILSON'S ABORTIVE SPEECH ON MAY 25 WHICH MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE WAS UNNECESSARILY OFFENSIVE TO PEOPLE AND POLITICIANS OF NI.

6. COMMENT: THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT EVENTS OF PAST FEW WEEKS IN NI HAVE ASSURED WHAT IS CERTAIN TO BE A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC DEBATE IN BRITAIN ABOUT THE NATURE AND FUTURE OF ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ULSTER. ALTHOUGH NEXT WEEK'S EMERGENCY SESSION OF PARLIAMENT WILL GIVE SOME INDICATION AS TO HOW THIS DEBATE WILL GO, WE IMAGINE FRONTBENCH SPOKESMEN OF BOTH PARTIES AND WHITEHALL OFFICIALS WILL TRY TO BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO ADVANCE FORMULATIONS THAT COULD UNDERMINE EFFORTS TO RECONSTRUCT SOMETHING POSITIVE IN NI'S POLITICAL CHAOS. ANNENBERG

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